

Introduction

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There are reasons why Gozo is a particularly apt environment for a cultural centre such as the University of Malta is in the process of building up in collaboration with the Ministry for Gozo. Among these reasons, there is Cardinal Newman's opinion that the main objective of a University is to provide an environment conducive to reflective and imaginative mental exercise. I tried to show briefly the applicability of this opinion to Gozo in the introduction to the proceedings of last year's seminar on Tourism.

By way of introduction to this collection of papers, with their largely historical focus, I am prompted by the very erudite discussion of both the classical references to Gozo and the later development of its distinct cultural identity to indulge in some musings which may be taken as a symptom of the professional disease my flesh is heir to as a result of my philosophical studies.

In the discussions I have read about whether Gozo is Calypso's island or not, I have of course often read that Homer was not concerned with establishing a realistic geographical itinerary for Odysseus, but rather with symbolic purposes. But I have never come across a discussion as to how apt would Gozo be as the correlative location for the Calypso episode in the symbolic schema of the *Odyssey*. Moreover, I surmise that the answer to that question might well turn out to also be another answer to the question about the justification of the University Gozo Centre's existence.

In the *Odyssey*, Calypso's island is a sort of halting-place where Odysseus is waiting, at the beginning of the poem, to be summoned back to a properly human life by the will-power of his son and the strong desire for his return to the real world as opposed to the quasi-unreal quality of existence on Calypso's island. It has, therefore, a double meaning.

Introduction

On the one hand, it is the place where Odysseus is undergoing punishment, for his part in the Sun cows episode which had led his companions to their death, through the disfunctioning of his memory. On Calypso's island, he gets no material to spin into a story, nothing happens that can become news, his life-story becomes just a gaping hole.

On the other hand, it is the place where it is possible to be revived, to be re-energized for flight, to rise from the depths of melancholy to a new joy in life, provided that the love of the son is rekindled for the Father.

Throughout the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is tormented by the fear of the loss of memory, the great threat which could prevent him finding his way back home to a truly human existence. His obsession is to preserve the past in his mind, for its disappearance would spell out the loss of himself as a human being. For Odysseus, recalling the past is a wager against death.

Calypso's island is the turning point where Odysseus, the representative of man as the voyager in exile from his true home, plunges deepest down in the direction of oblivion and is turned round upwards towards the destination of fulfilment of the self through the loving remembrance of offspring.

How much does this characterisation fit the cultural identity of Gozo, as it has been fashioned first by geomorphology and then by the chequered history recalled in this book? How many of us first found here to be a place of escape, where the reality of the modern world seemed to ebb away, only to be called back with a new impetus to commitment to the passionate pursuit of true human and family values? At any rate, it is my hope that this book, an exercise both in recalling the past and in exploring a present identity may prove for us an equivalent to the call in the heart of Telemachus which summoned Odysseus back to himself.